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# An Essay

# An Inaugural essay

# on Amenorrhoea

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# Amenorrhoea

The monthly periodical discharge, from the uterus of a coloured fluid resembling blood, commencing in this country from the age of fourteen to sixteen and continuing until from the forty-fifth to the fiftieth year; in every healthy female, in the absence of Gestation and Lactation, is called menstruation;

The cause of this discharge has occupied the attention of some of the most able medical Philosophers; and been investigated with much accuracy of observation, and minuteness of research.

Of the various hypotheses, which originated from this diligent search into its primary cause, nothing satisfactory or conclusive has, as yet, been produced;

and it most probably belongs to those inscrutable arcana of nature, into which even the "eagle eye of genius" can never penetrate.

To enter into a minute detail, of the variety of aberrations to which the menstrual flux is liable, would perhaps be unnecessary; and to attempt a formal exposition of the various hypotheses relative to its cause, would be to recall from a well merited oblivion, the many absurd doctrines that have from time to time distracted the medical world.

As regards the nature of the menstrual fluid, I have little to offer; holding it, however, to be the result of a peculiar secretory action of the uterus; though a contrary doctrine is maintained by some of the most distinguished of the profession,

who consider it merely an hemorrhage, such as take place from other mucous membranes: but be the theory what it may, this discharge is admitted to be essential to the natural offices of the organ.

For the full performance of which, several conditions are requisite; viz:

First. The uterus must be in a healthy condition; It may deviate from this, either in the substance of its structure, or in its mucous membrane.

Second. The ovaries must be in a natural state; how they influence the uterine system, I know not; but without their action its ultimate functions are not developed.

Third. The excitement of the uterus must be within certain limits; if the action be below a normal standard, it does not appear; if excessive, instead of this dis-

-charge inflammation is apt to ensue.
Fourth. The excitement must be directed to the uterus. It often happens that it takes a wrong direction, and falls on some other organ; as the Brain, Lungs, Stomach, &c, this arises from these organs, being the seat of irritation of the period for menstruation; and thus is it attempted to be explained the manner in which the vicarious dis-
-charges occur.
In this dissertation, I propose to confine my-
-self simply to Amenorrhœa; which has com-
-monly been divided by writers, into Amen-
-orrhœa Retentionis and Ob. Suppressionis; and as the terms have been indiscriminately used, I shall treat of them under the same head.
By a Retention, we are to understand the non-
-appearance of the menses at the proper period; technically called the age of puberty.

By a suppression, the causual interruption of the discharge, after it has once taken place. Causes. From the preceding view of the essential requisites, to the regular and due performance of the menstrual discharge, it is obvious that its non appearance will be the result of various and dissimilar causes; such as the imperfect development of the apparatus of generation; disease of its structure, malformation: chronic lesions of other organs, will impede its appearance. Cold, falls, violent emotions of the mind, as fright, &c; too great excitement of the uterus, or improper direction of this excitement will suppress it when once established.

The period of menstruation is modified by many circumstances; as climate, constitution, habit of life, &c; It is generally in such cases, that the great anxiety of the mother

for the welfare of offspring, finding the menses have not made their appearance; although the health of the patient be not affected, applies to some ignorant gossip; who under the "specious pretext of bringing down the courses," tortures the deceived patient by every species of stimulating drug, that passes under the imposing title of an emmenagogue; and should she not succeed, the patient applies in desperair to some "rapacious quack" or infamous vender of a certain specific: which improper treatment mostly induces some chronic disease, that leaves the patient to drag out a miserable existance the remainder of her life. This is not a picture of the imagination; it is a fact confirmed by every days experience; should, therefore, the Physician be consulted under these conditions, discretionary measures would be

necessary on his part; consisting in temperizing, prescribing for the little irregularities that may take place, so as to give nature time to complete her work.

Occasionally it happens that the female, owing to her rapid growth, is affected by some nervous attack; as palpitation of the heart, headache, a vitiated or whimsical appetite, &c. Our care here must be to regulate the diet of our patients, by allowing such as is the most nourishing and easily digested; by instituting a regular routine of athletic exercise, appropriate for a female, tempered by a moderation in its performance, and avoiding the austere vicissitudes of weather; tonic medicines may be required to give tone to the alimentary canal, the ones most used are those of the metalic preparations.

I have mentioned in condition third, that in some instances the discharge does not take place; owing it is believed to the deficiency of irritation or excitement of the uterus, as a normal irritation is held to be the fundamental cause, for the function of any organ to be called forth; in this case the patient is troubled with pains in the back, hips, and other unpleasant sensations about the pelvic region; there is also a slight attempt at the discharge; now we are to increase or produce that healthy or normal excitement, by administering such articles as are considered to have such a tendency; tincture of cantharides is highly spoken of for this purpose; but to prove successful it must be continued for several weeks: the common mode of administering it, is in small doses, three times a day at first, and increased

every third day, and when Leucorrhœa attends it is decidedly the most appropriate remedy, but must be exhibited in larger doses; Sulphur, Guaiacum, and Spiritus Terebinthinæ have been tried, and proved beneficial in many cases, but they must be properly timed; Madder is also recommended to be given in a strong decoction combined with cloves at the period of the attack. In cases, where there is undue irritation, a greater degree of pain in the lumber region, hips, &c, is produced; accompanied by a sense of fullness and burning in the part, also flushed face, headache, langour, nausea, &c, and the brain and stomach sympathize with the suffering organ. In this condition, we must beware of giving heating or irritating medicines, as they tend to aggravate instead of abating the disease; venesection

is here required; leeches, or cuts applied to the small of the back or thighs, will serve to reduce the irritation exceedingly; at the same time we give some mild laxative, so as to keep the bowels merely in a soluble state; the diet should be cooling and simply consisting of farinaceous articles; as Barley, Tapioca, arrow root, and the like.

In regard to the treatment where the irritation has fallen upon some other part of the system, we cannot lay down any regular mode of proceeding, as it must be so modified, as to suit the part affected; as a general rule however, we may say the indications are to moderate or suspend the disease of the suffering organ; then to endeavour to throw the desired action upon the uterus, at the expected period of menstruation; if the head be the part affected,

and there be much vascular action; venesection will be necessary, assisted by local depletion, by cups or leeches; after which the use of purgatives will be found eminently beneficial; they act in a twofold manner; first, by producing a revulsion; and secondly, by the discharge taking place, tend to deplete the system.

The stomach becoming the source of irritation, nearly the same mode of treatment may be persued, with the exception of purgatives, which cannot be so successfully employed, owing to their liability of increasing the irritation; enemata will be found to answer better under such circumstances. A direct stimulating application composed of ammonia in a fluid state has been recommended by Savagna of Italy, to be thrown into the vagina; he mentions of his having

succeeded in performing cures, after all other means had failed. Mr. Jackson of this city relates one or two cases where he emploied it, but was not so successful, they were however such as not to warrant a hope of perfect recovery, being of a consumptive diathesis.

The irregularities to which the female is obnoxious, are not always to be considered as requiring our interference so long as she continues to enjoy her wonted health; (as the period of return varies in different women and often in the same female;) but when this is interrupted we should examine minutely into all the circumstances of the case and treat accordingly, not merely for the suppression but the disease then existing; the obstruction being the effect and not the cause.

The numerous cases of scirrhus and cancer

of the uterus, which are so frequently seen in post mortem examinations. I have no doubt may be traced to the injudicious use of stimulants; which are so often employed for the reproduction of the menstrual flux.

Instances have occurred where the suppression took place on the wearing of the T bandage and produced many of the unpleasant effects arising from other causes and was not relieved until the bandage was dispensed with; the mode in which it acted I do not comprehend, and hence will not attempt to give any explanation of it. The most common cause of the sudden suppression is cold applied in some manner to the body, more particularly to the lower extremities; it is a common practice with the imprudent and thought-

less female to place her feet in cold water, or run about barefooted upon the cold floor so as to check the flow, that she might enjoy her temporary amusements, little reflecting upon the serious consequences she is entailing on her constitution: as a consequence there most commonly supervenes a train of violent symptoms, consisting of excruciating pain in the head, accompanied with pains in the back, intestines, and in the uterine region; these in some cases, if the female be of a nervous temperament, are so great as to produce vertigo, colic, hysteria, or assuming a variety of characters, simulating nearly every disease; here we are to loose sight of the suppression for the moment and attend to the symptoms existing, which call for immediate reduction; venesection presents

itself first as the most important; and when fever exists blood drawn from the foot has been known to succeed, where bleeding from the arm had failed; carrying it so far as the pain and pulse will justify; paying regard not to the quantity, but the effect produced; should the pain and local congestion still exist we resort to cups or leeches, and apply them immediately to the part or in the neighbourhood, sinapisms to the ankles may also be advantageously used; cathartics are at the same time to be resorted to, as the bowels are most always constipated; for this purpose calomel and jalap will answer, or some one of the neutral salts; the pediluvium will assist in relieving the local determination by equalizing the circulation. If colic

exists opium will frequently relieve the spasm, combined with calomel; it is found to answer better, it relieves pain at the same time evacuates the alimentary canal; enemata are also useful adjuvants in relieving the pain, they may be composed of starch, gum arabic, or flaxseed tea with laudanum.

The disease of which I have endeavoured to treat; after all the elaborate works written on the subject; still continues at times to be one of those which most baffles the Physician, and inflicts continued misery on the unfortunate sufferer; this may be partly owing to a species of false modesty so prevalent in the female sex, which induces them to conceal the incipiency of a disease, which is productive of the worst consequences.